Business Letters: An Introduction

Purpose of the Business Letter

When would you use a business letter, as opposed to other forms of communication?

Components of the Business Letter

Examine the following standard business letters. Identify the seven (7) components of the business letter.

15 Maple Street
Iowa City, Iowa 52240

July 1, 2001

Dr. Paula Chernow
Dean of students
University of Iowa
Iowa City, Iowa 52242

Dr. Chernow:

1 am writing to you in my capacity as chair of the Debating Society on campus. We are planning a trip during the spring break to York University in Toronto, Canada, to meet York's team in a debate contest. We need to raise funds for the proposed trip and would like your permission to sell pizza slices in the main lobby of the student union building every weekday from 11:30 am to 2:00 p.m. for three weeks, beginning on Monday, July 12, 1999.

We propose to set up a table in the southwest corner of the body, next to the bulletin boards. The pizza will be delivered to us by Paul Revere's pizza. The manager has agreed to supply us with an oven to heat the pizza, as well as paper, plastic good, and trash disposal drums. He will also provide the pizza at cost. We should be able to realize a profit of 35 cents on each slice.

I hope to hear from you soon about this proposal. I will call you in a few days in case you need to discuss it further. In the meantime, if you would like more details, please call me at 624-1907.

Sincerely,

Kenny Liu

Kenny Liu

Components of the Business Letter

15 Maple Street
Iowa City, Iowa 52240

July 1, 2001

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Dean of students
University of Iowa
Iowa City, Iowa 52242

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I am writing to you in my capacity as chair of the Debating
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in a few days in case you need to discuss it further. In the
meantime, if you would like more details, please call me at 624-
1907.

Sincerely,

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Letter Layout

In business letters, information is presented in a standard order:

1. Company Letterhead or Heading: If the paper has no letterhead, type the company name (if applicable) and the address at the very top of the page.

2. Date: Use numerals rather than words for the day, but you may spell out the full name of the month, or give it just as a number:

- June 18, 2001
- 18 June 2001
- 2001 06 18

3. Recipient's address block

Recipient's name
Title
Company
Full mailing address

4. Subject Line: The subject line announces the topic of the letter and can replace the salutation. It is usually bolded or underlined.

5. Salutation: Use the person's name whenever possible. "Dear Mr. X" is standard, but you can also address the person simply as "Mr. X".

Special Situation	Suggested Solution
You do not know the name of the person	"Dear Sir or Madam" "Dear Title" *Note: The best solution is to call the organization and find out!*
You are addressing a group	"Ladies" "Gentlemen" "Ladies and Gentlemen" "Colleagues" "Team"
You do not know the gender of the person	"Dear C. Laliberté"
You are addressing a woman whose marital status or preferred form of address is unknown	"Dear Ms. Laliberté"

6. Body: This is the actual message of the letter, divided into paragraphs between the salutation and the closing. It is usually limited to two or three paragraphs, each one 5 to 6 lines in length.

7. Closing: "Sincerely" is the standard. "Sincerely Yours" and "Regards" are also common.

8. Signature block: This should include your full name and title. Leave four lines between the closing and the signature block. If your name could be used for both men and women (e.g. Nour, Reda), type Mr. or one of Ms./Miss/Mrs. in brackets after your typed name.

9. End notations (optional): These are the abbreviations below the signature block.

End Notation	Meaning
MP:jc	The initials in capital letters are those of the writer; those in lower case are those of the typist. Do not use this notation if you typed your own letter.
Enclosures (2) Encl. (1) Encl.: Copy of invoice	This indicates that some documents are enclosed with the letter. To make sure the reader knows what accompanies the letter, it is useful to state how many documents are enclosed, or to list what they are.
c: R. Khalil	This indicates that a copy of the letter was sent to the person whose name appears after the "c".

Letter Format

In formatting letters, you have three main styles to choose from. They are all acceptable; the key is to be consistent.

Traditional Style

> ➢ The date, close, and signature are tabbed to the right
> ➢ Each paragraph is indented five spaces
> ➢ Punctuation can be closed (included in the address, date, salutation and closing) or mixed (put in only after the salutation and closing)

Wolverine Financial Services
311 Bank Street Detroit, MI 00000

June 25, 2001

Laurel Hill Conference Center,
36 Winding Hill Road,
Laurel Hill, MI 00000

Subject: Request for information

Dear Sir or Madam:

    Could you please send us literature on the Laurel Hill Conference Center? We would appreciate any material that illustrates the center's facilities and its setting. Please also include a rate schedule.

    We are in the preliminary stages of selecting a site for our annual staff retreat, which will be held on December 15. We would also appreciate the following information:
        - Can the center accommodate our retreat on that day?
        - Do you have a conference room big enough to accommodate 60 people?
        - Are workshop rooms (20 people each) also available?
        - Do you provide catering?

    We hope to make a final selection of the site by August 1; therefore, we would appreciate your prompt reply. I would be glad to meet with your sales agent after reviewing your literature.

Sincerely,

Robert Sekora
Vice President

pn

Block Style

> ➢ Every line begins at the margin, including the date, closing and signature
> ➢ Punctuation is open; i.e., no punctuation except in the body of the letter

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<div style="border:1px solid">

El Forn Bakery
211 Kasr El Aini
Cairo

31 July 2001

Alfi Truck Sales, Inc
12 Nabatat Street
Garden City, Cairo

Subject: Invoice no. 12345

Dear Sir or Madam

I am writing concerning your invoice no. 12345, July 15, 2001.
Specifically, I wish to request that the invoice be cancelled, and a credit
issued.

On June 15, our delivery truck broke down, only three days after your
service department had installed a rebuilt engine. The truck was then
towed to your garage. Ashraf Merghani, your mechanic, rewired the
generator and presented us with a bill for LE 500. He explained that the
warranty covers parts only, not labor costs.

We do not feel that these charges are justified. The poor quality of the
engine, not our driver's negligence, is responsible for the truck's
breakdown. We believe that Alfi Truck Sales should stand behind its
service and assume all costs of repairs.

We have been satisfied with your services over many years of business,
and we trust that you can resolve this problem within the next month. We
thank you for your prompt attention to this matter.

Sincerely

Atif Taha
President

</div>

Semi Block Style

- ➢ Each line begins at the margin
- ➢ Date, close and signature are tabbed to the right
- ➢ Punctuation may be open (no punctuation other than in the body), closed (punctuation in all parts of the letter), or mixed (punctuation only after salutation, closing, and body)

PROCOM BUSINESS COMPUTER
23 Mossadak Street
Dokki, Cairo

January 25, 2000

Ms. Mervet Malek
Sunburst Organic Grocers
10 Hassan Sabry
Zamalek, Cairo

Dear Ms. Malek:

We are grateful for the promptness with which you supplied the financial statement we requested upon receiving your order (Invoice A-1678) for six Databank cash registers. Your determination to expand a small business in the current economic climate is commendable.

Our first step in considering applications for credit is to examine the applicant's bottom line for profitability after twenty-four consecutive months of business. As your venture is but six months old, we regret that we cannot at this time extend a line of credit.

We will be glad to do business with you on a cash basis for now, and will review your credit standing at the appropriate time. If your capitalization changes, please let us know. The Databank is the best register on the market for small business needs, and we promise you the best prices and services. We wish you luck with your enterprise and hope that we can be of future service to you.

Sincerely,

Amr Soleiman
Credit Manager

Skill Practice:

1. Go back to the case study on p.14. Assume that the General Manager has agreed to Sara's request. Write a letter from Sara to Nour Ghonim, Director of Fundraising for the Society for Handicapped Children.

In her letter, Sara should state the following:

> *- her company is donating one week of her time to the Charity*
> *- she will begin work on the project next month*
> *- she encloses a work plan and budget*

2. Exchange letters with a colleague. Evaluate his/her work based on the following criteria:

> ➤ *Does it demonstrate good use of business style? (refer to pp. 21-22)*
> ➤ *Does it contain all the necessary components? (refer to p. 25)*
> ➤ *Is it formatted properly? (refer to pp. 26-30)*

Your comments:

Faxes and Memos

Faxes

For many business professionals, faxes have replaced business letters as the chosen medium for external correspondence. Faxes allow you to exchange documents much faster than regular mail or international couriers, while still transmitting official looking documents. In fact, in many countries, faxes have the same legal value as an original document, and a faxed signature is as binding as a signature on an original document.

Yet, an analysis of international fax usage reveals that faxes tend to be slightly more informal than business letters, perhaps because of their immediacy (Bertini, 1995). As such, they tend to mix informal language with more formal forms of address - in other words, they have become a blend of the internal memo, which relies on a more direct and informal approach, and the business letter, which relies on formality to convey professionalism.

Memos

Memorandums, more usually called *memos,* are the form commonly used for *short,* relatively *informal* messages between members of the same organization. The memo provides a simplified, standardized format for communicating information *concisely.* The many uses of memos include announcements and instructions, statements of policy, and informal reports.

Because memos are usually exchanged between people who have a regular working relationship, the *tone* of memos tends to be more informal than the tone of other business letters. Company jargon, for example, is permissible in a memo. Similarly, the writer can usually assume that the reader knows the basic facts and so can get to the heart of the message with little buildup. Note, however, that the level of formality should reflect the relationship between the writer and the reader.

At the same time, a memo, like any piece of written communication, must be prepared with care. It must be *typed* neatly, and contain *complete, accurate* information. It should adhere to the principles of standard English and maintain a *courteous* tone no matter how familiar the correspondents may be.

Unlike other types of business letters, the memo is not prepared on company letterhead, nor does it include an inside address, salutation, or complimentary closing. A memo is a streamlined form and many companies provide printed forms to speed up memo preparation even further. When no form is available, using the Memo Wizard in Microsoft Word can assist you in creating professional looking memos.

Reflection

Look at the fax and memo examples on the next two pages. What are the main differences between two? Record your observations below, focusing on the five main areas outlined for you.

Faxes	Memos
1. Usage:.	1. Usage:.
2. Content:.	2. Content:.
3. Organization:	3. Organization:
4. Language and Tone:	4. Language and Tone:
5. Format:	5. Format:

Example of a Fax

Alfi Truck Sales

FACSIMILE TRANSMITTAL SHEET

TO:	FROM:
Atif Taha	M. Malik

COMPANY:	DATE:
El Forn Bakery	2 August 2001

FAX NUMBER:	TOTAL NO. OF PAGES INCLUDING COVER:
02.555.6345	1

PHONE NUMBER:	SENDER'S REFERENCE NUMBER:
02.555.1345	

RE:	YOUR REFERENCE NUMBER:
Credit for Invoice no. 12345	

☐ URGENT   ☐ FOR REVIEW   ☐ PLEASE COMMENT   ☐ PLEASE REPLY ☐ PLEASE RECYCLE

Mr. Taha,

This is to follow up on our conversation of this morning concerning the above invoice. Thank you for taking the time to review the situation with me over the past few weeks.

After consulting with the mechanics involved in the repairs of your truck, as well as our insurance company, I am happy to report that we will issue a full credit for the invoice in question. Although our warranty does not cover labor costs, we all agree   that it would be unfair to bill you for labor only three days after the new parts were installed.

I thank you for your patience and on-going cooperation in this matter. Please do not hesitate to contact me should you have additional questions.

Warm regards,

M. Malik

M. Malik

Example of a Memo

EgyptCo.

Memo

To: K. Sherif, Legal Department

From: M. Kamal, Personnel

CC:

Date: 4/ 28/ 02

Re: Search for Secretary for Legal Department

Here is the progress report you requested about our search for a new secretary.

We have now interviewed eight individuals and have narrowed our choices to three:

1. **Margaret O'Connell:** types 65 w.p.m., takes dictation at 120 w.p.m., has had five years' experience in a law office. She knows how to use the MOJ databank.
2. **Daisy Robinson:** types 70 w.p.m., takes dictation at 120 w.p.m., has just graduated from Community College (majoring in Secretarial Studies).
3. **Donald Trumbo:** types 65 w.p.m., takes dictation at 100 w.p.m., has worked as a legal assistant for three years and taken paralegal courses at Community College.

The hiring committee will meet tomorrow, April 29, at 9:30 a.m., to discuss the candidates and make a decision. Your presence at the meeting (in Ms. Gray's office) is, of course, welcome.

Guidelines for Faxes	Guidelines for Memos
1. Usage: Faxes are primarily used for transmitting external correspondence, or documents requiring a signature. Faxes are also used between branches of the same company to transmit non-electronic or signed documents such as purchase orders, agreements, purchase orders, etc.	**1. Usage:** Memos are exclusively used for internal correspondence, such as announcements, instructions, policy, and reports.
2. Content: For external correspondence, the information presented in a fax should be put in context, as in a business letter.	**2. Content:** The information presented in memos should always be complete and accurate. However, you can usually assume that the recipient has some degree of knowledge about the situation. In that case, it is not necessary to provide background information.
3. Organization: As in business letters, each paragraph fulfills a specific function: - Paragraph 1 states the topic - Paragraph 2 provides background/main information - Paragraph 3 requests an action, or offers a statement of good will	**3. Organization:** Like all written correspondence, memos should be organized into clear paragraphs, each dealing with a separate idea: - Paragraph 1 should state the purpose - Paragraph 2 presents the facts - Paragraph 3 makes recommendations, or calls for action
4. Language and Tone: The language of faxes tends to be slightly less formal than for business letters. Standard business formulas (*"we would be grateful"*, *"we submit for your consideration"*) are replaced by Please + Imperative (*"please get back to us"*).	**4. Language and Tone:** Memos tend to use a more informal level of language, although the level of formality will depend on who the recipient is. Company and industry jargon is allowed.
5. Format: Faxes follow a standard format which includes (see page 46): - Company name or letterhead - Heading, which provides information about names of sender and recipient, phone and fax numbers, date, number of pages transmitted and subject line. - Salutation and Closing - Signature Block	**5. Format:** Like letters and faxes, memos follow a standard layout (see page 47). Memos should always be typed, but unlike letters, they do not include an address, salutation, or complimentary closing.

Components of the Fax

Alfi Truck Sales

FACSIMILE TRANSMITTAL SHEET

TO:	FROM:
Atif Taha	M. Malik

COMPANY:	DATE:
El Forn Bakery	2 August 2001

FAX NUMBER:	TOTAL NO. OF PAGES INCLUDING COVER:
02.555.6345	1

PHONE NUMBER:	SENDER'S REFERENCE NUMBER:
02.555.1345	

RE:	YOUR REFERENCE NUMBER:
Credit for,Invoice no. 12345	

Address box including subject line and number of pages

☐ URGENT   ☐ FOR REVIEW   ☐ PLEASE COMMENT   ☐ PLEASE REPLY ☐ PLEASE RECYCLE

Mr. Taha,   *Salutation*

This is to follow up on our conversation of this morning concerning the above invoice. Thank you for taking the time to review the situation with me over the past few weeks.

After consulting with the mechanics involved in the repairs of your truck, as well as our insurance company, I am happy to report that we will issue a full credit for the invoice in question. Although our warranty does not cover labor costs, we all agree   that it would be unfair to bill you for labor only three days after the new parts were installed.   *Body*

I thank you for your patience and on-going cooperation in this matter. Please do not hesitate to contact me should you have additional questions.

Warm regards,   *Closing*

M. Malik

M. Malik   Signature

Components of the Memo

EgyptCo.

Memo

Company name (optional)

Memo Heading

To: K. Sherif, Legal Department

From: M. Kamal, Personnel

CC:

Date: 4/ 28/ 02

Re: Search for Secretary for Legal Department

"Address" block (includes date and subject line)

Here is the progress report you requested about our search for a new secretary.

We have now interviewed eight individuals and have narrowed our choices to three:

4.   **Margaret O'Connell:** types 65 w.p.m., takes dictation at 120 w.p.m., has had five years' experience in a law office. She knows how to use the MOU databank.
5.   **Daisy Robinson:** types 70 w.p.m., takes dictation at 120 w.p.m., has just graduated from Community College (majoring in Secretarial Studies).
6.   **Donald Trumbo:** types 65 w.p.m., takes dictation at 100 w.p.m., has worked as a legal assistant for three years and taken paralegal courses at Community College.

Body

The hiring committee will meet tomorrow, April 29, at 9:30 a.m., to discuss the candidates and make a decision. Your presence at the meeting (in Ms. Gray's office) is, of course, welcome.

Skill Practice

Choose ONE of the following assignments:

1. Write a fax to a business relation (outside your organization), who has asked you to recommend a Business Correspondence course. Tell this person that you recently took a course, and explain how you found the course useful (or not). Close with a statement of good will.

Ask a peer to review your fax and check for the following:

> - *Is the content complete and accurate?*
> - *Is the tone professional, yet informal?*
> - *Is the fax organized into clear paragraphs?*
> - *Are all the components of the fax present?*

Your peer should refer to pages 45-46 for an explanation of guidelines and components.

OR

2. Write a memo to your supervisor requesting attendance at a Business Correspondence Workshop. Explain to your supervisor how you could benefit from such a course - be specific! Close with suggested dates for the workshop.

Ask a peer to review your memo and check for the following:

> - *Is the content complete and accurate?*
> - *Is the tone appropriate?*
> - *Is the language informal, yet courteous?*
> - *Is the information in the memo organized correctly?*
> - *Are all the components of the memo present?*

You peer should refer to pages 45 and 47 for an explanation of guidelines and components.

Electronic Mail

In a few short years, electronic mail has changed the way we do business. Offices at opposite ends of the world can resolve almost any situation instantaneously, at a fraction of the cost of a phone call. E-mail also allows you to reach many people simultaneously, and to get almost instant feedback from a large audience. Another advantage of e-mail is that it provides an instant record of written correspondence, which you can easily file for easy retrieval.

However, the very features that make e-mail so attractive as a medium can also cause endless frustrations. The immediate attention e-mail messages seem to command can easily disrupt the normal workflow. The speed and low cost of e-mail also means that most of us are deluged with messages of little or no interest to us, and many workers find that they have to devote a sizeable portion of their work time to managing e-mail. As well, the immediacy that e-mail provides has lead to the emergence of an e-mail culture where informality rules, and clarity is not always a priority. Because people write e-mails as they would speak, and do it quickly, e-mail recipients often have to "read between the lines" to fully understand e-mail messages - and given that there is no facial interaction or verbal feedback going on, there is great potential for misunderstandings to occur.

For these reasons, business professionals need to approach e-mail correspondence in the same careful way they would approach any other type of written correspondence. E-mail messages convey an impression of who you are - following a few simple guidelines can ensure that you project a professional image at all times.
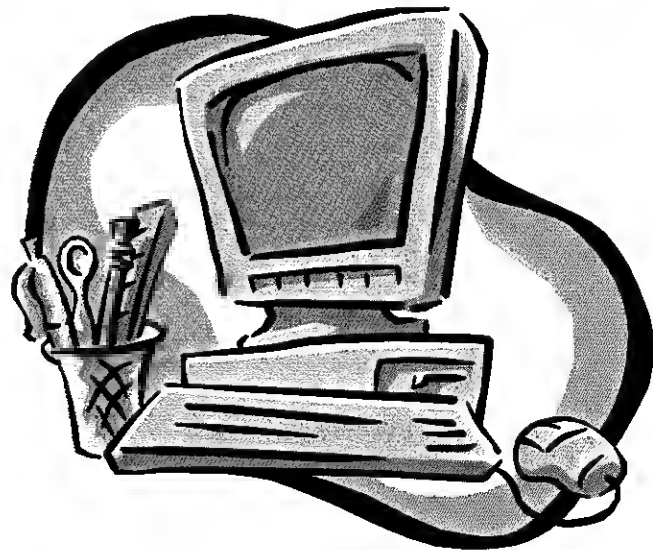
Reflection

In small groups, list some advantages and some limitations of using e-mail. Under limitations, pay special attention to the "dangers" of using e-mail - what can go wrong?

Advantages	Limitations and Dangers

Special Considerations When Using E-mail	Your Notes
1. Making sure you are read Some people receive hundreds of messages every day, and must decide which messages they will read, and which they'll immediately delete. Make sure you get read by: - Using an informative subject line - Organizing your message so that the important information comes first - Writing only when you really have something to say	
2. Communicating Clearly To avoid any misunderstanding: - Provide complete and accurate information - Organize the information into clear paragraphs - Use correct language (spelling and grammar) - Avoid jokes and sarcasm - you could be taken seriously	
3. Respecting others' time Show your professionalism by: - Directing your messages only to those who are truly concerned by it. - Not hitting "reply all" unless your response really needs to be read by the whole group. - Not circulating jokes at work.	

V. Important

Special Considerations When Using E-mail	Your Notes
4. Sharing confidential or sensitive information - An e-mail message leaves a permanent record of your message in someone else's hands. It can be circulated and copied at will. Keep that in mind when recording "private" or "confidential" thoughts on e-mail. - Use "bcc" wisely. Remember that the original recipient will not know you copied someone else on the message. This could have serious consequences if the "bcc" recipient were to hit the "reply all" button or inadvertently forward your e-mail.	
5. Avoiding Angry Reactions Because e-mail is quick, we tend to react right away. NEVER write an e-mail when you're angry - it can't be taken back once you press the "send" button.	
6. Limiting Personal Use Your employer has access to your mailbox. Your messages are not as personal as you may think. Make sure you understand your employer's policy concerning personal e-mails at work, and follow the rules!	

Getting Your Message Across

Ensuring that you are read and understood involves:

> ➤ using an informative subject line
> ➤ organizing your message so that it can easily be processed.
> ➤ providing clear and accurate information

The Subject Line

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1. State your message Clearly, Concisely and Descriptively:

A descriptive subject line draws the reader to the message by providing an accurate sense of what you have to say *before* the message itself is opened and read.

2. Limit use of jargon:

Resist the urge to use jargon, acronyms or technical terms, even if you are certain the reader will understand. You want to entice readers, not scare them away before they start reading.

3. Remember the hidden reader:

When the messages are forwarded from one reader to the next, the original subject line often is left intact. Make sure you address the whole audience.

4. Don't try to trick the reader:

A reader may fall for a misleading subject line once, but the next message you send might be ignored or deleted before it is read. Someone who rates all messages as "important, read this!" will not be read for very long.

Look at the following subject lines. Which will best help your reader prioritize the message? Which are the most informative?

1. IMPORTANT
2. Your message
3. Business Correspondence Workshops (Nov 8-9): report
4. Sales figures – 1999 – 2000
5. Planned Marketing Meeting, Oct 5.

Organizing Text

Busy people do not have time to read long e-mails. Ensure that you grab their attention with a strong lead, and that you structure the information so that the most important information comes first.

The Lead

The lead is the first paragraph of your message. It is what determines whether your reader will read the entire message or not. More specifically, the lead:

> ➢ Delivers the document's most important, compelling information right up front, often in the form of a conclusion.
> ➢ Summarizes what is to come later in the document.
> ➢ Captures -- and holds -- the reader's attention.

Look and analyze the following lead. Does it grab your attention? Do you immediately know what the message is about? Why or why not?

This is a response I have written to Gloria, who recently shared her thoughts about her concerns for our association and our board. I think she has raised important issues that we must address. I send it to you because Gloria and I believe we absolutely need a strategic planning session no later than December.

Look at a revised version. Why is this one better?

Tim, Gloria and I agree our association faces enormous challenges. Let's hold a strategic planning session by December to review board members' concerns and begin planning for the future.

How does a harried reader decide which e-mail documents to read and respond to, and which to delete from the screen? Typically, the reader scans the lead -- the first few words and sentences -- and then decides whether to continue reading. This is why it is so important to deliver your primary message **right up** front, at the beginning of your e-mail document. To do so, **structure your e-mails as an inverted, or upside-down, pyramid.** The most important information is communicated right up front, in the lead. Following the lead, information is presented in descending order of importance.


```
Most Important Information or Conclusion
        Next Most Important
            Information
        Next Most Important
            Information
        Next Most Important
            Information
       Next Most Important
           Information
        Least Important
          Information
```
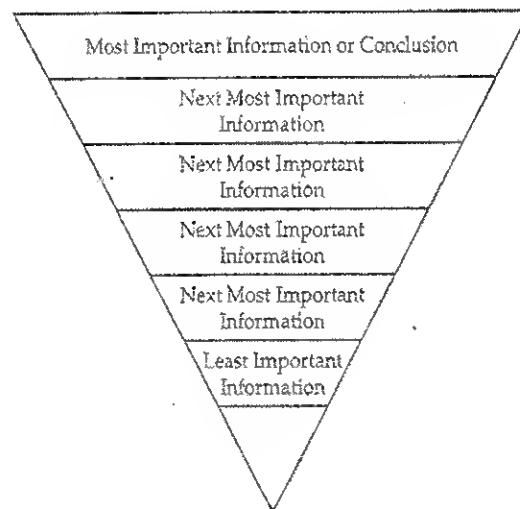
Read this e-mail. How could it be improved?

Dear Personnel Manager:

My name is Matt Kennedy. I'm a 22-year-old college senior who will graduate from State University this June with a degree in English.

During my four years at SU, I served first as a writer for, then as the editor of, the university's literary magazine. In addition, as a junior, I was a sports columnist for SU's student newspaper, *the Beacon*.

My university-level editorial work was a natural offshoot of my experience at City High School. During my tenure at CHS, I was actively involved as a member of the school's yearbook and newspaper staffs.

I would like to put my communications experience to work for XYZ Company. I hope you will consider me for an entry-level position in your public relations department.

Sincerely,
Matt Kennedy

Now look at the same e-mail, rewritten in an inverted style pyramid format. How is it better?

Dear Personnel Manager:

I am a senior at State University, set to receive a bachelor's degree in English this June. I am seeking an entry-level position in XYZ Company's public relations department.

What assets would I bring to XYZ?

1. **Teamwork:** I served on the staffs of SU's literary magazine and student newspaper. In high school, I worked on the yearbook and newspaper staffs. I understand how to work as a part of a team of writers, editors, designers and photographers.

2. **Leadership:** As the editor of SU's literary magazine, I developed a knack for motivating staff and an understanding of what it takes to complete a project on a deadline and within budget.

I hope to have the opportunity to meet with you in the near future.

Sincerely,

Matt Kennedy

Communicating Clearly

E-mail tends to be the most informal form of written communication. While an informal tone is acceptable for e-mails, a few rules still apply:

Humor:

Don't try to tell jokes or incorporate humor into your writing. E-mail is an impersonal medium that offers none of the benefits of inflection, facial expression or body language. If you must use humor, add a smiley mark or electronic shorthand as a cue to help your reader understand your intent. But remember that not all e-mail users are familiar with these notations, so use them judiciously.

Technical Language:

If you are sending a technical e-mail document to a reader or group of readers who share your expertise, it is probably all right to use technical language. Even with technical material, the basics hold: write in the active voice, eliminate unnecessary words; adhere to the mechanical rules of good writing; and write with your reader in mind. If there is any possibility your e-mail could be forwarded to a non-technical reader, adjust your language accordingly, or include an executive summary at the beginning of your document.

Abbreviations: Use legitimate abbreviations to shorten e-mail messages, only if your readers -- intended and hidden -- will recognize and understand them. Don't overdo it. Too many abbreviations can make a sentence hard to read:

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*I received your message an **hr.** ago and intend to act on it **ASAP**. I am curious, however. Did you **cc** the manager of the **E** coast office as well?*

Clarify uncommon abbreviations on the first reference by writing it out and citing the abbreviation in parentheses. Then use the abbreviation throughout the rest of the document:

The findings of the Electronic Messaging Association (EMA) indicate phenomenal growth for e-mail.

Capital Letters: A message written in all uppercase letters is more difficult to read than one written in standard style. The human eye is used to reading a mixture of uppercase and lowercase letters. When you draft e-mail in all uppercase letters, you run the risk of slowing down -- and annoying -- a reader unaccustomed to this type of visual presentation. By the same token, resist the urge to write e-mail messages in the lowercase. It may be quicker to write in all caps or all lowercase, but the result will be more difficult to read.

Which of these is easiest to read?

EMPLOYEE USE OF E-MAIL CAN EXPOSE A BUSINES5 TO LIABILITY BASED ON MESSAGE'S CONTENT. IN 1995 CHEVRON PAID $2.2 MILLION TO FOUR AFRICAN AMERICAN EMPLOYEES TO SETTLE A RACIAL HARASSMENT LAWSUIT AFTER THE EMPLOYEES CLAIMED THEY WERE HARASSED BY E-MAIL.*

employee use of e-mail can expose a business to liability based on a message's content. in 1995 chevron paid $2.2 million to four african american employees to settle a racial harassment lawsuit after the employees claimed they were harassed by e-mail.

Employee use of e-mail can expose a business to liability based on a message's content. In 1995 Chevron paid $2.2 million to four African American employees to settle a racial harassment lawsuit after the employees claimed they were harassed by e-mail.

Skill Practice

Rewrite the following e-mail:

- provide a clear, concise, attention-grabbing subject line

- write a strong lead by moving the most important information to the front

- use a pyramid style format

- use clear language

Jane Tomm, a grad. of State Univ., with a master's in journalism and a bachelor's in Eng., is an integral member of the Health Dept's public relation's team, serving initially as a public information officer then as manager of special projects. an employee of the state for 12 years, jane also has published two books of children's fiction and is a volunteer tutor with the city schools, teaching writing skills to high school students. Effective today, Jane has been named communications chief for the state health dept. Why she would agree to come work for us is mystery! ☺

All supervisors, managers and staff will begin reporting to Jane immediately. Please plan to attend tomorrow's 7 A.M. staff meeting to learn more about Jane's promotion and her plans for the dept.

E-mail shorthand

Popular Electronic Acronyms

BCNU	be seeing you	OBTW	oh, by the way
BRB	be right back	OIC	oh, I see
BTW	by the way	PLS	please
CUL	see you later	PMFJI	pardon me for jumping in
F2F	face to face	PRES	presentation
FAQ	frequently asked question	PTP	pardon the pun
FOAF	friend of a friend	QTY'S	quantities
FWIW	for what it's worth	REC'D	received
FYA	for your amusement	RGDS	regards
FYEO	for your eyes only	ROTF	rolling on the floor
FYI	for your information	ROTFL	rolling on the floor laughing
GMTA	great minds think alike	THX	thanks
HHOK	ha-ha, only kidding	TIA	thanks in advance
IMHO	in my humble opinion	TMRW	tomorrow
IOW	in other words	TTFN	ta-ta for now
LOL	laughing out loud	U	you
MOTOS	member of the opposite sex	WB	welcome back
MOTSS	member of the same sex	WRT	with regards to
MSG	message	WTG	way to go
NLT	no later than	YR or UR	your

PUNCTUATING E-MAIL WITH SMILEYS AND SHORTHAND (continued)

Popular Emoticons

SMILEY-EMOTICON	DESCRIPTION	SMILEY-EMOTICON	DESCRIPTION
:-)	happy; kidding; smiling; grinning	>:P	sticking tongue out
:-[	sad sarcasm	:-P	sticking tongue out
:-(	sad; angry; chagrined	8-)	wide-eyed
;-(	feel like crying	8-O	shocked; amazed
:-&	tongue-tied	:-|	apathetic
:!-(	crying	:-/	skeptical; perplexed; resigned
:-<	very upset	:-o	shocked and amazed
%-)	happy confused; eyes crossed; smirking	:->	sarcastic smile
:-||	angry	:-]	happy sarcasm or smirk
%-(	sad confused	;^)	smirking smile
:-(o)	yelling	(:/)	sarcasm
:-*	kiss	<:/&	stomach in knots
:-D	laughing; demonic laugh	>:-)	devilish
:-\	undecided	O:-)	angelic
;-)	winking	X-(	brain dead
:-#	my lips are sealed		

Some e-mail find smileys limiting, and use electronic shorthand or a combination of smileys and acronyms to express emotions:

SHORTHAND	**EMOTIONS**
<g>	grin
<grin>	grin
<s>	sigh
<gasp>	gasp
<l>	laugh
<lol>	laughing out loud
<jk>	just kidding
< >	no comment

Again, don't use electronic shorthand if you have any question about your reader's ability to understand it.